

Message Text

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ORIGIN INR-07

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TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMCONSUL HONG KONG

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BANGKOK AND VIENTIANE PLEASE PASS EA/VLC DIRECTOR BROWN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINR, LA, VM

SUBJECT: ASSESSMENT OF JULY VISIT TO LAOS BY VIETNAMESE
GOVERNMENT/PARTY LEADERS

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FOLLOWING IS INR ASSESSMENT OF OUTCOME OF RECENT VISIT OF
HIGH LEVEL VIETNAMESE DELEGATION TO LAOS:

VIETNAM AND LAOS SIGN MAJOR AGREEMENTS SOLIDIFYING CLOSE
RELATIONSHIP

VIETNAM'S TOP PARTY AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS MET WITH THE LAO

IN VIENTIANE JULY 15-18 TO SOLIDIFY THEIR PREVIOUSLY CLOSE RELATIONSHIP. THE TWO SIDES ISSUED A JOINT STATEMENT AND SIGNED A "TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION," A BORDER "TREATY," AND A THREE-YEAR ECONOMIC AGREEMENT. THE JOINT STATEMENT, INTER ALIA, WAS CRITICAL OF US SOUTHEAST ASIA POLICIES.

A VIETNAMESE DELEGATION, LED BY PARTY CHIEF LE DUAN AND PRIME MINISTER AND THIRD-RANKING POLITBURO MEMBER PHAM VAN DONG AND ALSO INCLUDING TWO OTHER POLITBURO MEMBERS, WAS HOSTED BY VIRTUALLY EVERY TOP LAO PARTY AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL. AFTER THREE DAYS OF DISCUSSIONS, AND HIGHLY PUBLICIZED TOURS, BANQUETS, AND RALLIES, THE TWO SIDES ISSUED A LONG JOINT STATEMENT IN WHICH THEY AGREED ON THE SITUATION IN ALL OF THE WORLD'S MAJOR TROUBLE SPOTS AND EXPRESSED THEIR WILLINGNESS TO DEVELOP NORMAL RELATIONS WITH THE US BUT "DEMANDED" THE US MUST STOP ASSISTING "LAO REACTIONARIES IN EXILE" AND MUST PROVIDE POST-WAR ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. THE US WAS "SEVERELY CONDEMNED" FOR "CONTINUING TO MAINTAIN ITS ARMED FORCES AND MILITARY BASES IN THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN REGION AND FOR PLOTTING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ASEAN," AND THE STATEMENT LABELED ASEAN A POTENTIAL "DE FACTO MILITARY ALLIANCE."

VIETNAM AND LAOS SIGNED A 25 YEAR TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION WHICH:

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--FORMALIZED THE "SPECIAL," "EQUAL," AND PERMANENT SRV-LAO RELATIONSHIP AND THEIR COMMITMENT TO "FRATERNAL COOPERATION" WITH CAMBODIA (DESPITE SERIOUS PRESENT BORDER PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE SRV AND CAMBODIA);

--PLEDGED COOPERATION IN MUTUAL DEFENSE AND IN OPPOSING "FOREIGN REACTIONARY FORCES" (PROBABLY A REFERENCE TO RESISTANCE FORCES WHICH RECEIVE SOME SUPPORT FROM THE THAI MILITARY);

--ENDORSED A DUAL POLICY OF SUPPORT TO THE "SOUTHEAST ASIAN PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE" AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONS WITH THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN GOVERNMENTS; AND

--AGREED TO HELP EACH OTHER IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TO ENTER INTO PREFERENTIAL TRADE ARRANGEMENTS AND TO COOPERATE ACROSS THE BOARD IN ECONOMIC, TECHNICAL AND CULTURAL FIELDS.

THE TWO SIDES ALSO SIGNED A "TREATY ON THE DELIMITATION OF THE NATIONAL FRONTIER." DETAILS HAVE NOT BEEN MADE PUBLIC.

DESPITE A REFERENCE TO THIS DOCUMENT AS A "MODEL OF FRIENDLY NEIGHBORLY POLICY," IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE AGREEMENT FORMALLY TURNED OVER TO VIETNAM AREAS IN THE EASTERN LAO PANHANDLE WHICH HAVE BEEN UNDER DE FACTO VIETNAMESE CONTROL FOR YEARS.

VIETNAM ALSO AGREED TO PROVIDE LAOS WITH GRANT AID AND INTEREST-FREE CREDIT FOR THE 1978-80 PERIOD. THIS AID AND OTHER RECENT AGREEMENTS WILL MOST LIKELY CONTINUE THE MAJOR EFFORT SINCE LAST YEAR TO IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION LINKAGES BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES IN ORDER TO WEAN LAND-LOCKED LAOS FROM DEPENDENCE ON THAILAND AS ITS MAJOR TRADE CONDUIT. THE AID AGREEMENT MAY ALSO INCLUDE A CONTINUATION OF VIETNAMESE MILITARY ASSISTANCE WHICH HAS BEEN
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SUBSTANTIAL.

THE HIGH LEVEL OF THE VIETNAMESE DELEGATION AND THE EXTENSIVE PRESS COVERAGE ACCORDED ITS VISIT SUGGESTS THAT THE VIETNAMESE WERE MAKING AN INTENTIONAL EFFORT TO IMPRESS OTHERS, MOST NOTABLY THAILAND AND THE US, OF VIETNAM'S DETERMINATION TO SUPPORT ITS LAO ALLY. THE VIETNAMESE DELEGATION'S VISIT ALSO MAY HAVE BEEN INTENDED TO PROVIDE THE LAO LEADERSHIP WITH A BADLY NEEDED MORALE BOOST IN LIGHT OF CONSIDERABLE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, SERIOUS DEMORALIZATION WITHIN THE BUREAUCRACY, AND PERSISTENT ARMED RESISTANCE. SPECIFICALLY, THE PRESENCE OF POLITBURO MEMBERS PHAM HUNG AND GENERAL CHU HUY MAN--BOTH OF WHOM HAVE EXTENSIVE INSURGENCY EXPERIENCE--IN THE SRV DELEGATION AND THEIR SIDE-TRIP TO CHAMPASSAK PROVINCE IN THE SOUTH (PROBABLY TO VISIT PAVN TROOPS) SUGGESTS THE VIETNAMESE OFFERED ADVICE TO THE LAO ON HOW TO MORE EFFECTIVELY HANDLE TROUBLESOME RESISTANCE FORCES. VANCE

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